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Ready for a spring fitness challenge?

From gyms and offices to Instagram and Facebook, fitness challenges seem to be everywhere. They give you a reason to get moving — and the built-in structure can make it easier to stick with it. If you can't find a challenge that fits your schedule or fitness level, build your own. With warmer weather on the way, it's a great time to refresh your routine and try something new.

Here are some tips for creating a do-it-yourself fitness challenge that's fun and motivating.

Start with a goal that matters to you. Then design your challenge around it. For example:

If your fitness goal is to...	You might commit to...
Move more in general	■ Taking X number of steps per day, counted on a smartwatch or fitness tracker ■ Cycling X number of miles per week
Train for a 5K	■ Following a training program from one of the many "couch to 5K"-style apps
Improve your flexibility	■ Trying a different 10-minute stretching or yoga routine from YouTube each day (it's OK to repeat favorites)

Incorporate variety into your plan. This helps fend off boredom. You can do this by switching up activities or gradually ramping up the intensity or pace of a single activity. Spring is a good time to mix indoor workouts with outdoor exercise.



Pick start and end dates for your challenge.

You'll see a lot of 30-day challenges online, but if your goal is to build a lasting habit, consider going for longer. It takes about two months, on average, for a behavior to become a habit.

Invite others to join you. Friends, family, or coworkers can help keep you accountable. Plus, a little friendly competition keeps things interesting. Share progress through a fitness app or private Facebook group.

Give yourself an incentive. Before Day 1, decide how you'll reward yourself when you finish. Rewards don't have to be big — something small that you enjoy can make it easier to stay motivated and finish strong.

Show up and shape up!

Shape Up NYC offers free fitness classes like dance fitness, yoga, circuit training, Zumba, and much more. To find a class near you, click [here](#).

You're not alone:

How to feel more connected

If you feel lonely, you're in good company. About a third of Americans report feeling lonely, and one in four report a lack of social support. It's a widespread problem with serious health risks.

Loneliness raises the risk for anxiety and depression, especially for those living alone. Not only can it affect your mental health but also your physical health, upping your chances for heart disease, stroke, dementia, and more.

But there's hope if you feel isolated: Small changes make a big difference. Here are a few steps to help you reconnect — and stay connected.

Pencil people in

Schedule regular check-ins with friends and family, even if it's just a quick text message. Phone calls, emails, and texts can all help you keep up relationships. Set reminders on your phone at a specific time every day to make connection part of your routine.

Get involved

Connect with your community by volunteering. Volunteering for a cause you care about can help you connect with others, ease loneliness, and give you a sense of purpose — benefits that support your overall health.

Try something new

Have fun and make friends while doing something you enjoy. Explore options such as getting back to an old hobby, finding a new activity, or taking a class to learn something new.

Write it down

Make a list of the people who care about you and how they've shown support. Read it back to yourself when you are feeling lonely and reach out to express your gratitude to the special people in your life.

Stop the scroll

Despite its name, social media doesn't always make you feel connected. If you're using it to endlessly scroll, you may feel more isolated; instead, message friends and interact with their posts. Set daily limits for social apps.

Find support

MetroPlusHealth offers behavioral services for children, teens, and adults. To get help, click [here](#). If you ever think about harming yourself or others, call **800.273.TALK (8255)**. Support is available 24/7.



How to raise body-positive kids

It's hard to believe, but research shows that kids as young as age 3 may have **body image** issues. These can stem from people making comments that stick. Photos in magazines and online that have been heavily edited can shape how young people think their bodies should look, too.

If a child feels they don't measure up, their self-esteem can suffer. This can make them less likely to seek out friends. It can also increase their odds of having a mental health issue or eating disorder.

As a parent, you can help your child or teen have a healthy relationship with their body, no matter what it looks like. Follow these strategies to bolster their self-image.

Walk the walk

Kids often copy adults' behavior. The way you view and treat your body will influence your child's body image. So, try to model these kinds of good habits:

- Eat three healthy meals a day, rather than skipping meals.
- Fill your plate with lots of lean meats, vegetables, and fruits.
- Eat until you're full, not necessarily until your plate is clean.
- Work movement into your day.
- Don't say negative things about your own body, especially in front of your kids.
- Be happy to be in photos with your children.

Talk the talk

The way you communicate with your child about food and exercise matters. Focus on how eating healthy foods helps you feel good and how physical activity makes you stronger.

If your child says something negative about their body, explain how healthy bodies can look different from the ones in magazines and on television. You should also emphasize how good character is more important than their appearance.

Spot signs of trouble

It's common for young people to worry a little about their bodies. But you should watch for indications of a serious issue. Possible signs may include:

- **Depression:** becoming socially isolated or irritable, or eating and sleeping differently than before
- **Eating disorder:** eating food in secret, skipping meals, exercising excessively, or eating large meals but not gaining weight



Spring into healthier family meals

Refresh family meals with spring produce like spinach. Raw or cooked, spinach is packed with iron, folate, and vitamins A, C, and K. Blend it into sauces, smoothies, soups, or meatballs. It's an easy way to add nutrients if spinach is a tough sell for kids. For extra vitamin C and fiber, pair it with strawberries. Need inspiration? Try this **[Strawberry Spinach Salad](#)** recipe.

Caregiving for a child with autism spectrum disorder

Caregiving for a child with **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** comes with challenges, but it also can be rewarding and meaningful. Getting support can help you avoid caregiver burnout and provide your child with the best care possible.

Meet the team

Your pediatrician often identifies signs of ASD. But after a diagnosis, you'll connect with other providers, such as psychologists and therapists.

Know the plan

Starting treatment is the first step toward a healthy, happy future for your child and family. Work with the team on a plan.

Together, decide on goals for your child. Meet regularly to share updates and assess progress.

Ask for help

You don't have to face all caregiving challenges alone. To find more resources, go to the American Autism Association's website [here](#). You can also ask



friends and family for help with daily tasks, watching your kids when you need a break, or listening when you've had a tough day.

Also, think about joining a support group. You'll connect with other parents in similar situations who understand what you're going through.

Care for yourself

Meeting your child's needs can take a lot of time and energy. Take breaks when you can to do things you enjoy.

Coping with aggressive behavior

Some children with autism may show aggressive behaviors when they feel overwhelmed. This can include threats or name-calling, as well as hurting themselves or others.

Triggers may include sensory overload or changes in routine. Try offering a distraction, such as singing a song or taking a walk, then address the underlying cause.

Take steps to prevent similar situations in the future. Instead of an open-ended question like "What do you need?" offer clear choices, such as "Do you need a snack or a break?"

If meltdowns happen often, talk with your child's doctor. Medications or other treatments may help and can benefit the whole family.

Learn more about autism

Children with autism can thrive with help. Detect early signs of autism and take the next steps in getting your child the support they need. Learn more about autism by taking this short [quiz](#).

Your GLP-1 food road map

Starting a GLP-1 medication can feel like stepping into a whole new chapter — especially when it comes to food. Maybe you're not as hungry, your stomach is sensitive, or you feel full faster.

While these changes are normal, adjusting to them can take a little practice. But with a few simple tweaks, you can stay comfortable and manage side effects.

How GLP-1s affect your gut

Ozempic, Wegovy, and other GLP-1s work by slowing down how quickly food leaves your stomach. That can lead to:

- Feeling full for a longer time
- Eating less than usual
- Having trouble with heavy or greasy meals
- Experiencing nausea, constipation, or diarrhea

Understanding why eating feels different can help you make choices that go down a lot easier.

Mealtime tips

Since digestion moves more slowly with GLP-1s, gentler and smarter eating habits can go a long way. Here's how to make it easier for you:

- Opt for smaller, more frequent meals.
- Stop eating when you are comfortably full.
- Take your time eating so your stomach can keep up.

And because GLP-1 weight loss can lead to muscle loss, you should also add protein to every meal. Think chicken, beans, or yogurt. Or try protein shakes if other options aren't appealing right now.

Keeping side effects in check

You're not alone if your stomach feels a little off at first. Here's how to handle side effects:

- If you feel nauseous, stick with simple foods. Eat whole-grain toast or cereal, and sip ginger tea. Avoid anything that's fried.

- If constipation shows up, focus on fiber and fluids. Snack on apples or nuts, and be sure to stay hydrated.
- If diarrhea is the issue, give your stomach a break. Focus on drinking plenty of water. Avoid dairy products and high-fiber foods until your stomach settles.
- If heartburn starts to flare, adjust portions and timing. Try eating smaller meals and avoiding spicy foods. Also, don't lie down for two to three hours after eating.

Side effects are common on GLP-1s, especially when you're just getting started. Talk with your care team if you're worried about your symptoms. They can help you figure out whether it's part of the adjustment period or something that needs attention.



4 tips to decode food labels

Most of us can spot calories, sugar, and sodium. But food labels hold far more clues than people realize — and knowing how to read them can change how you shop.

1. Start with serving size

We usually zero in on calories first, but that number is only for *one* serving — and most packages contain far more than you'd guess. Don't let those calories, sugars, fats, and sodium sneak up on you. Start with the serving size to keep everything else on the label in perspective.

2. Scan the ingredient list lineup

Pro tip: Ingredients are listed in order by weight, from most to least. The first few ingredients tell the real story of what you're eating. Sugar or corn syrup at the top? Long ingredient list with tons of weird words or chemicals? That's your red flag that the product leans toward heavily processed or is artificially sweetened.

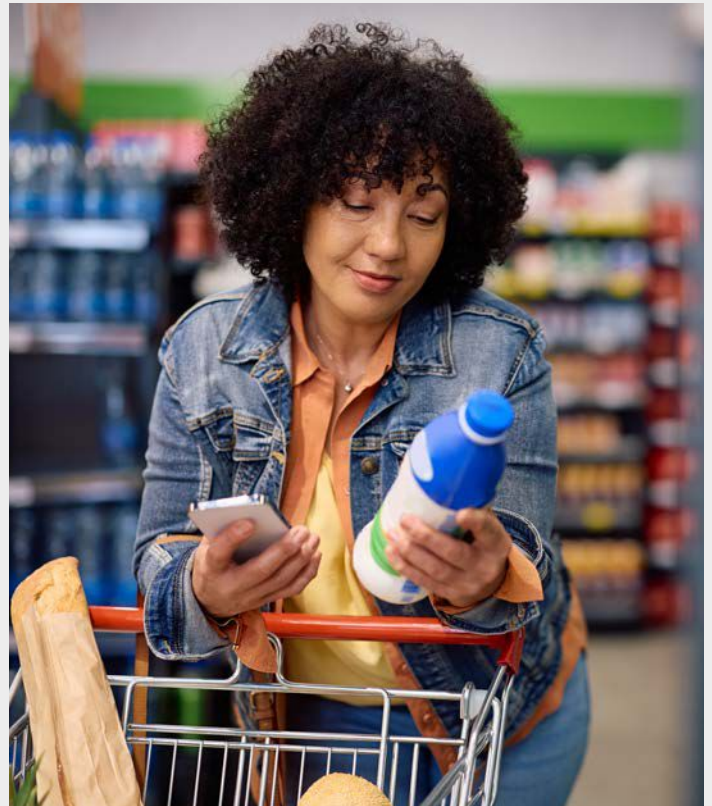
3. Watch out for tricky claims

Labels love getting your attention with words like *all natural*, *sugar-free*, or *multigrain*. But they don't always mean what you think. Sugar-free might still contain artificial sweeteners. And multigrain isn't the same as whole grain.

Best practice is to check the nutrition facts and ingredient lists, not the marketing. Whenever possible, choose foods that resemble real, recognizable ingredients.

4. Let percent daily value guide you

This is your shortcut, a great tool for making healthier choices between similar items. The Percent Daily Value (%DV) tells you how much one serving contributes to your daily nutrient needs. With it, you can quickly see which options give you more of the



good stuff and less of what you're trying to limit.

- 5% DV or less = low (good for sodium, added sugars, saturated fat)
- 20% DV or more = high (good for fiber, calcium, vitamin D, potassium)

These quick tips turn all that fine print into something useful, helping you pick foods that help you feel your best.

Start with one healthy change

One small change today can make a difference. See how simple steps can lead to healthier choices over time in this short [video](#).

How technology is making diabetes easier to manage

A tiny computer working around the clock to keep you healthy may sound like science fiction. For people with **diabetes**, however, innovations like that are making it easier to live with the condition.

If you don't already use diabetes technology, here are some options to discuss with your diabetes care team.

Continuous glucose monitors

Pricking your finger gives you a snapshot of your blood glucose levels. With a continuous glucose monitor or CGM, a small sensor tracks your levels at all times.

This allows you to get instant feedback and spot trends. For instance, your levels might rise at night. You can then work with your team on a plan to bring them down.

Insulin pumps

This small device provides steady insulin doses throughout the day. Some pumps are worn outside the body in a pocket, or on a belt. Others attach directly to the skin with an adhesive pad and deliver insulin through a small catheter.

According to the American Diabetes Association, insulin pumps can be especially helpful for active people or those prone to low blood glucose.

Artificial pancreas systems

Also called a closed-loop system or bionic pancreas, these systems have three parts: a CGM, an insulin pump, and software that links the two.

The CGM tracks blood glucose levels and sends the data to the software, which is stored on a smartphone app or the pump itself. The program then calculates how much insulin is needed to keep levels in range, and the pump delivers the dose automatically.

Studies show these systems can improve blood glucose control. Many people who use them also report feeling less stressed about managing diabetes.



Smart insulin pens

Preloaded insulin first appeared in the 1980s as a portable alternative to vials and syringes. Today, many smart pens do the math for you. They may track insulin doses, send reminders, and generate reports.

Apps and software

Many apps and software programs connect to devices like CGMs and pens. Others focus on lifestyle habits, including nutrition and physical activity. These tools can help you track your health and share important information with your care team.

Traveling this spring?

Diabetes doesn't have to hold you back. With a little planning, you'll be ready for any adventure. For tips on safe travel with diabetes, click [here](#).